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The Hanging of the Crane

BY

Henry W. Longfellow

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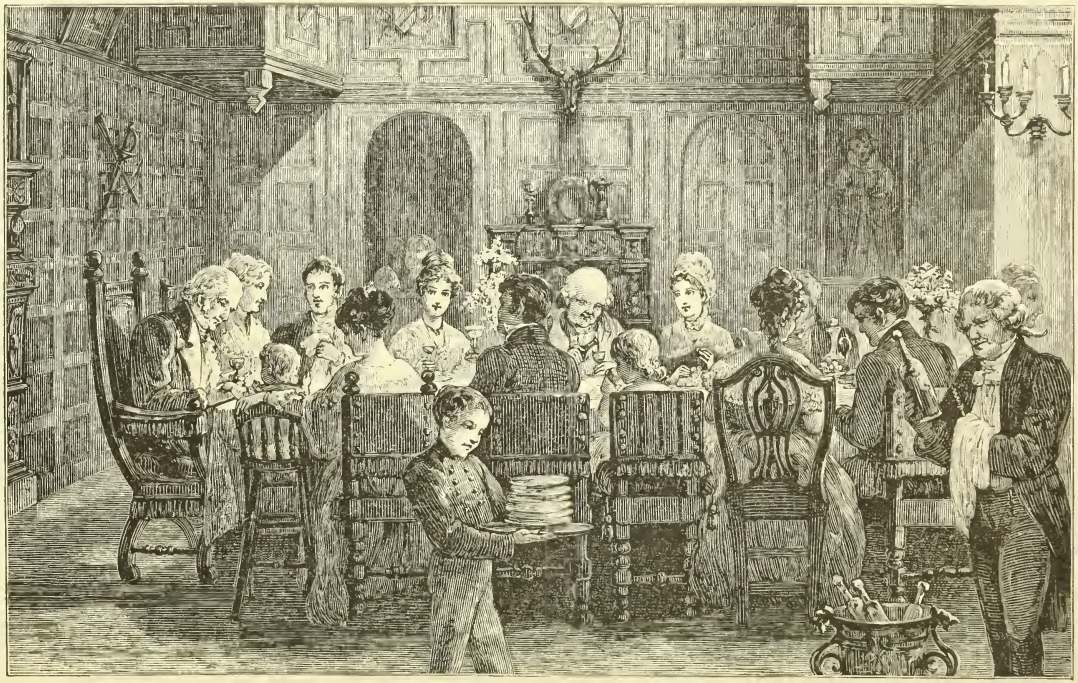

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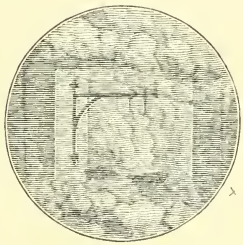
THE HANGING OF THE CRANE

BY

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

The Engravings by A. V. S. ANTHONY, *under whose supervision the book is prepared, and* W. J. LINTON.

	Artist.	Page
THE GOLDEN WEDDING	MARY A. HALLOCK	*Front.*
"The lights are out, and gone are all the guests, That thronging came with merriment and jests"	"	"	15
"But still the fire upon the hearth burns on, And I alone remain"	"	"	15
"Like a new star just sprung to birth"	"	"	17
"So said the guests in speech and song"	"	"	17
"As in the chimney, burning bright, We hung the iron crane to-night"	"	"	18
"And now I sit and muse on what may be"	"	"	21
"Shapes indeterminate, that gleam and fade As shadows passing into deeper shade"	"	"	21
"They want no guests ; they needs must be Each other's own best company"	"	"	23

"More divine,
The light of love shines over all" — MARY A. HALLOCK — 24

"The picture fades; as at a village fair
A showman's views dissolve into the air" — " — " — 27

"Through the open door
I see the selfsame scene" — " — " — 27

"A royal guest with flaxen hair,
Who, throned upon his lofty chair" — " — " — 29

"He ruleth by the right divine
Of helplessness" — " — " — 30

"The nurse comes rustling like the sea" — " — " — 31

"And so good night to King Canute" — " — " — 32

"As one who walking in a forest sees
A lovely landscape through the parted trees" — THOMAS MORAN — 35

"Or as we see the moon sometimes revealed
Through drifting clouds" — " — " — 35

"There are two guests at table now" — MARY A. HALLOCK — 37

"A Princess from the Fairy Tales
The very pattern girl of girls" — " — " — 37

"Above their bowls with rims of blue
Four azure eyes of deeper hue
Are looking, dreamy with delight" — " — " — 38

"The world that rolls
With all its freight of troubled souls
Into the days that are to be" — THOMAS MORAN — 39

"Again the tossing boughs shut out the scene,
Again the drifting vapors intervene" THOMAS MORAN 43

"As round a pebble into water thrown
Dilates a ring of light" " " 43

"As if fair Ariadne's Crown
Out of the sky had fallen down MARY A. HALLOCK 45

"Like timid birds that fain would fly,
But do not dare to leave their nests" " " 46

"In the divine knight-errantry
Of youth, that travels sea and land
Seeking adventures" THOMAS MORAN 47

"And youths, who in their strength elate
Challenge the van and front of fate" MARY A. HALLOCK 48

"The meadow-brook, that seemeth to stand still" THOMAS MORAN 51

"Quickens its current as it nears the mill" " " 51

"The table dwindles, and again
I see the two alone remain" MARY A. HALLOCK 53

"In Ceylon or in Zanzibar,
Or sunny regions of Cathay" THOMAS MORAN 54

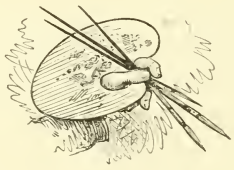
"In the boisterous camp
Mid clink of arms and horse's tramp" MARY A. HALLOCK 54

"I see the patient mother read,
With aching heart" " " 55

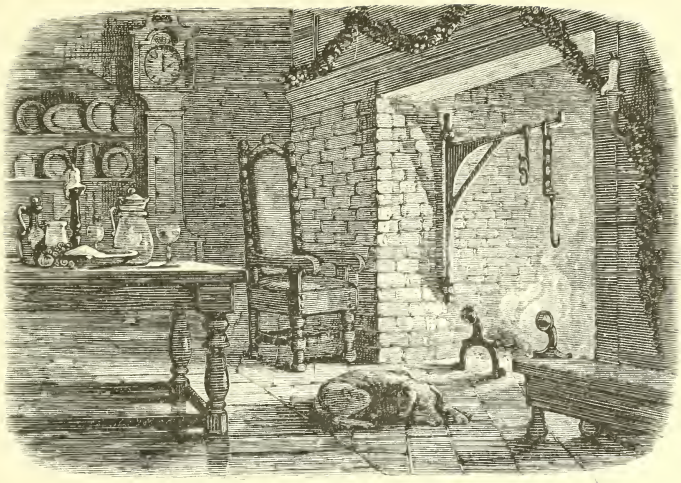
"Wrecks that float
Disabled on those seas remote" THOMAS MORAN 55

"There among the drowned or slain"	THOMAS MORAN	56
"After a day of clouds and wind and rain Sometimes the setting sun breaks out again"	" "	59
"Then like a ruby from the horizon's ring Drops down into the night"	" "	59
"The guests come thronging in once more, Quick footsteps sound along the floor"	MARY A. HALLOCK	61
"The trooping children crowd the stair"	" "	62
"The ancient bridegroom and the bride, Serenely smiling on the scene, Behold, well-pleased, on every side Their forms and features multiplied"	" "	63
"Or lamps upon a bridge at night Stretch on and on before the sight, Till the long vista endless seems"	THOMAS MORAN	64

[The Emblematical and Ornamental Vignettes are drawn by JOHN J. HARLEY.]



THE HANGING OF THE CRANE

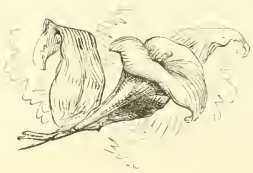


The lights are out, and gone are all the guests
That thronging came with merriment and jests
To celebrate the Hanging of the Crane
In the new house, — into the night are gone;
But still the fire upon the hearth burns on,
And I alone remain.

Like a new star just sprung to birth,
And rolled on its harmonious way
Into the boundless realms of space!

So said the guests in speech and song,
As in the chimney, burning bright,
We hung the iron crane to-night,
And merry was the feast and long.

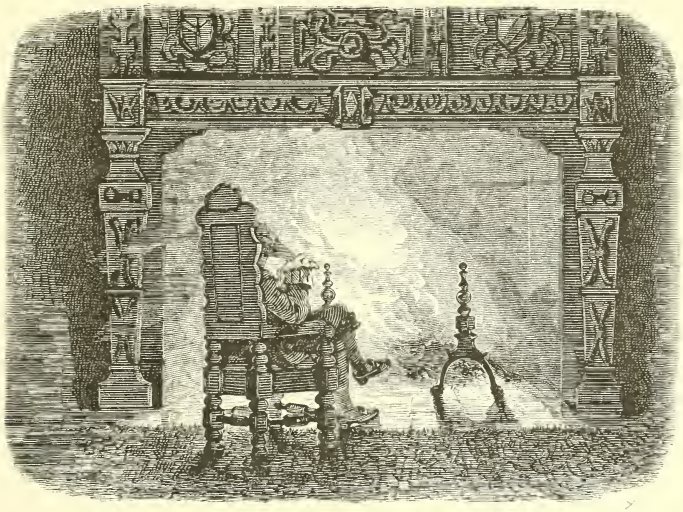
II.



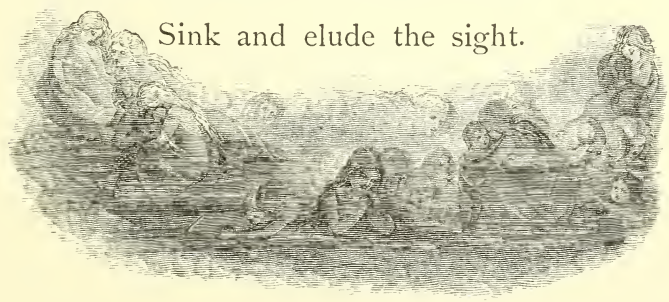
O fortunate, O happy day,

When a new household finds its place

Among the myriad homes of earth,



And now I sit and muse on what may be,
And in my vision see, or seem to see,
Through floating vapors interfused with light,
Shapes indeterminate, that gleam and fade,
As shadows passing into deeper shade
Sink and elude the sight.



For two alone, there in the hall,

Is spread the table round and small;

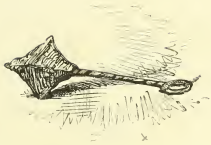
Upon the polished silver shine

The evening lamps, but, more divine,

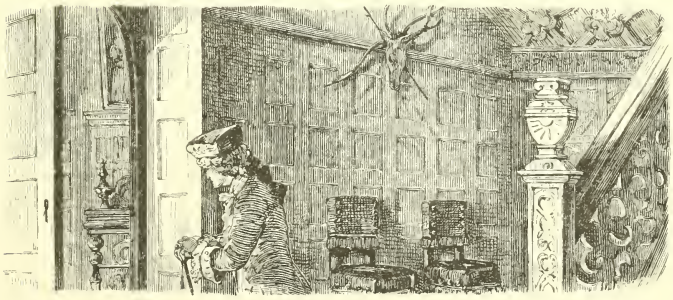
The light of love shines over all;

Of love, that says not mine and thine,
But ours, for ours is thine and mine.
They want no guests, to come between
Their tender glances like a screen,
And tell them tales of land and sea,
And whatsoever may betide
The great, forgotten world outside;
They want no guests; they needs must be
Each other's own best company.

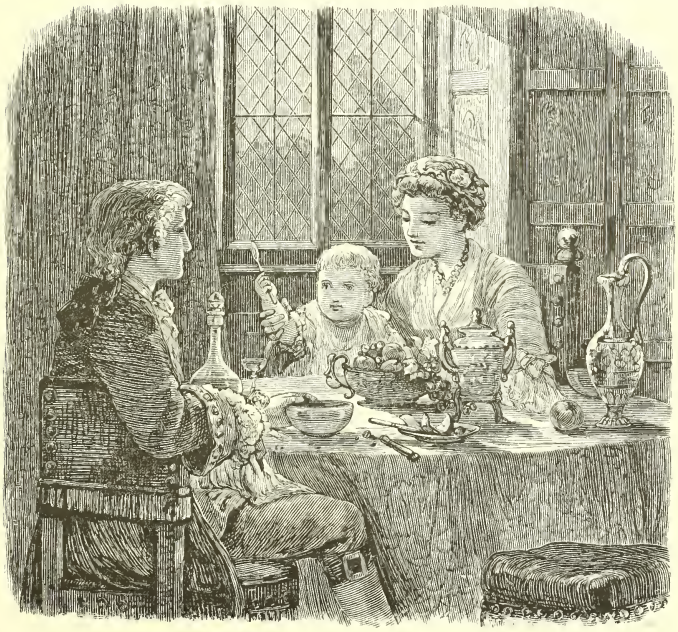
III.



The picture fades; as at a village fair
A showman's views, dissolving into air,
Again appear transfigured on the screen,
So in my fancy this; and now once more,
In part transfigured, through the open door
Appears the selfsame scene.



Seated, I see the two again,
But not alone; they entertain
A little angel unaware,
With face as round as is the moon;
A royal guest with flaxen hair,
Who, throned upon his lofty chair,
Drums on the table with his spoon,



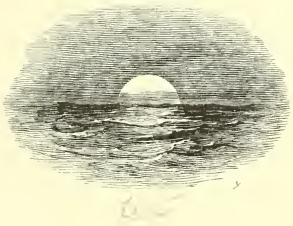
Then drops it careless on the floor,
To grasp at things unseen before.
Are these celestial manners? these
The ways that win, the arts that please?
Ah yes; consider well the guest,
And whatsoe'er he does seems best;
He ruleth by the right divine
Of helplessness, so lately born
In purple chambers of the morn,

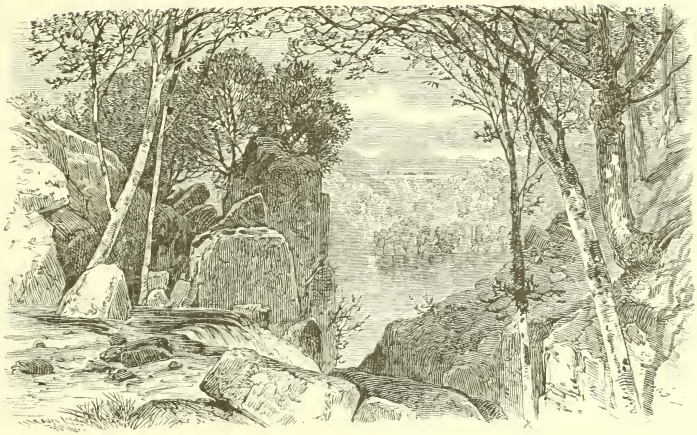
As sovereign over thee and thine.
He speaketh not; and yet there lies

A conversation in his eyes;
The golden silence of the Greek,
The gravest wisdom of the wise,
Not spoken in language, but in looks
More legible than printed books,
As if he could but would not speak.
And now, O monarch absolute,
Thy power is put to proof; for, lo!

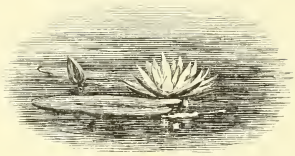
Resistless, fathomless, and slow,
The nurse comes rustling like the sea,
And pushes back thy chair and thee,
And so good night to King Canute.

IV.





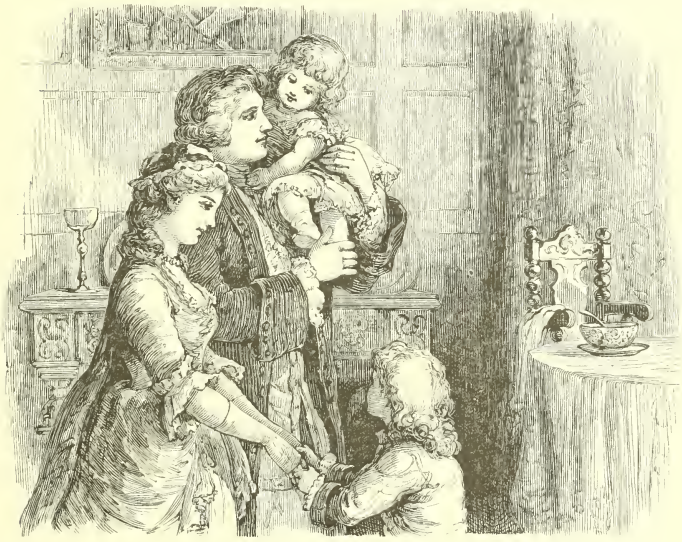
As one who walking in a forest sees
A lovely landscape through the parted trees,
Then sees it not, for boughs that intervene;
Or as we see the moon sometimes revealed
Through drifting clouds, and then again concealed,
So I behold the scene.



There are two guests at table now;

The king, deposed and older grown,

No longer occupies the throne, —



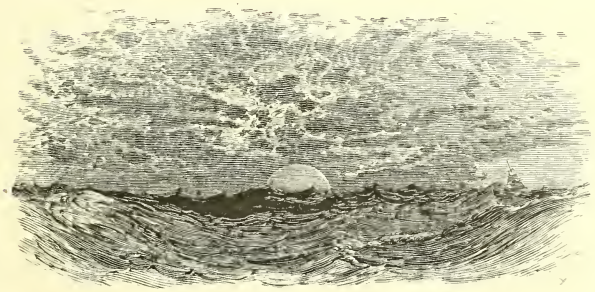
The crown is on his sister's brow;

A Princess from the Fairy Tales,

The very pattern girl of girls,
All covered and embowered in curls,
Rose-tinted from the Isle of Flowers,
And sailing with soft, silken sails
From far-off Dreamland into ours.
Above their bowls with rims of blue
Four azure eyes of deeper hue
Are looking, dreamy with delight;

Limpid as planets that emerge
Above the ocean's rounded verge,

Soft-shining through the summer night.
Steadfast they gaze, yet nothing see
Beyond the horizon of their bowls;
Nor care they for the world that rolls
With all its freight of troubled souls
Into the days that are to be.



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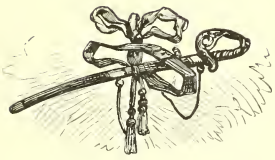
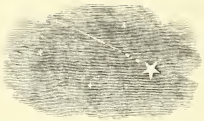
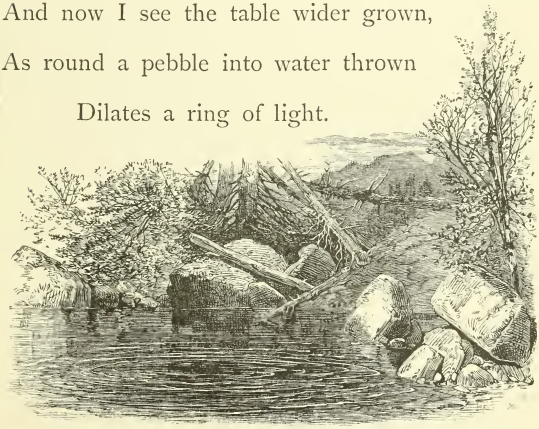




Again the tossing boughs shut out the scene,
Again the drifting vapors intervene,
And the moon's pallid disk is hidden quite;
And now I see the table wider grown,
As round a pebble into water thrown
Dilates a ring of light.



I see the table wider grown,

I see it garlanded with guests,

As if fair Ariadne's Crown

Out of the sky had fallen down;

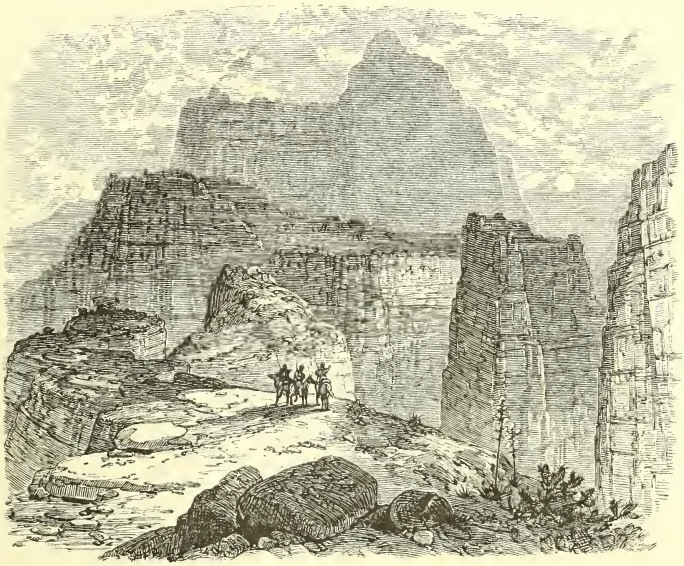
Maidens within whose tender breasts

A thousand restless hopes and fears,

Forth reaching to the coming years,
Flutter awhile, then quiet lie,
Like timid birds that fain would fly,

But do not dare to leave their nests;—
And youths, who in their strength elate
Challenge the van and front of fate,
Eager as champions to be

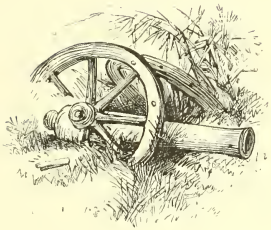
In the divine knight-errantry
Of youth, that travels sea and land



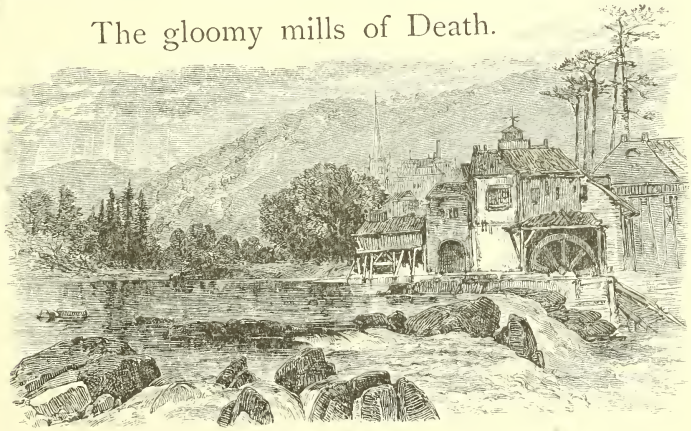
Seeking adventures, or pursues,
Through cities, and through solitudes
Frequented by the lyric Muse,
The phantom with the beckoning hand,
That still allures and still eludes.
O sweet illusions of the brain!

O sudden thrills of fire and frost!
The world is bright while ye remain,
And dark and dead when ye are lost!

VI.



THE meadow-brook, that seemeth to stand still,
Quickens its current as it nears the mill;
And so the stream of Time that lingereth
In level places, and so dull appears,
Runs with a swifter current as it nears
The gloomy mills of Death.



And now, like the magician's scroll,
That in the owner's keeping shrinks
With every wish he speaks or thinks,
Till the last wish consumes the whole,

The table dwindles, and again
I see the two alone remain.
The crown of stars is broken in parts;
Its jewels, brighter than the day,

Have one by one been stolen away
To shine in other homes and hearts.
One is a wanderer now afar

In Ceylon or in Zanzibar,
Or sunny regions of Cathay;

And one is in the boisterous camp
Mid clink of arms and horse's tramp,
And battle's terrible array.

I see the patient mother read,

With aching heart, of wrecks that float

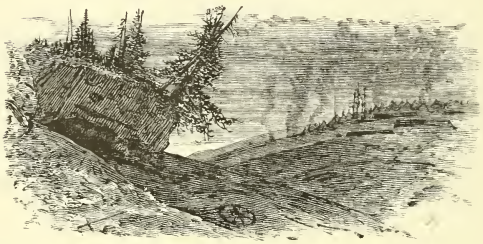
Disabled on those seas remote,

Or of some great heroic deed

On battle-fields, where thousands bleed

To lift one hero into fame.

Anxious she bends her graceful head
Above these chronicles of pain,
And trembles with a secret dread
Lest there among the drowned or slain
She find the one beloved name.



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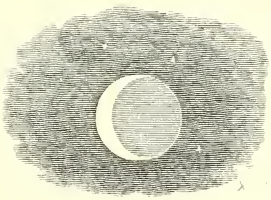
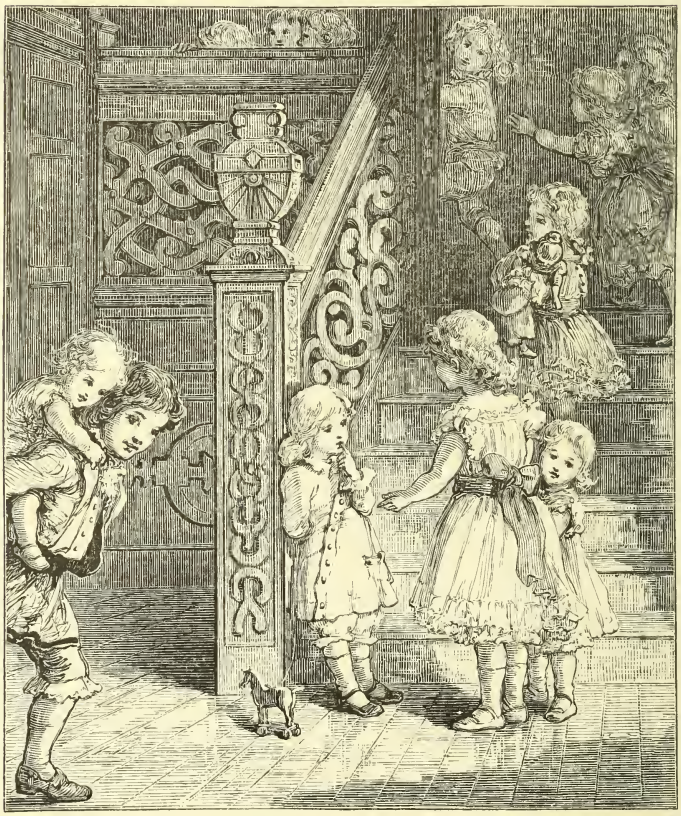


After a day of cloud and wind and rain
Sometimes the setting sun breaks out again,
And, touching all the darksome woods with light,
Smiles on the fields, until they laugh and sing,
Then like a ruby from the horizon's ring
Drops down into the night.

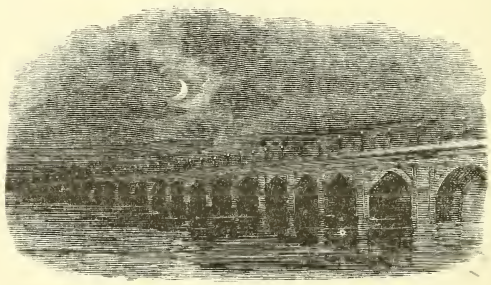
Quick footsteps sound along the floor,
The trooping children crowd the stair,
And in and out and everywhere
Flashes along the corridor
The sunshine of their golden hair.



On the round table in the hall
Another Ariadne's Crown
Out of the sky hath fallen down;

More than one Monarch of the Moon
Is drumming with his silver spoon;
The light of love shines over all.

O fortunate, O happy day!
The people sing, the people say.
The ancient bridegroom and the bride,
Serenely smiling on the scene,
Behold, well-pleased, on every side
Their forms and features multiplied,
As the reflection of a light
Between two burnished mirrors gleams,
Or lamps upon a bridge at night
Stretch on and on before the sight,
Till the long vista endless seems.



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